

# ANNUAL REPORT OF THE MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH

TO THE

## Chailey Rural District Council.

Gentlemen,—I now present to you my twenty-second annual report for the twelve months ending December 31st, 1895. The statement, though comparing favourably with the average for the past five years, is not on the whole so satisfactory as that for 1894.

I find we have passed through another twelve months with a comparatively small amount of those more serious forms of sickness which are classified as zymotic or preventable, yet it will be found that the mortality from all causes is considerably in excess of that for several years past.

During the period now under consideration no particular circumstance has arisen calling for any special action on my part. There have been comparatively few complaints made to me personally by inhabitants of the district, and none of them were of serious importance—one was with reference to a slaughter-house at the south end of Ditchling village. The premises complained of are situated close to the main road, and is apt to become a source of nuisance if not kept perfectly clean, and all refuse animal accumulation promptly removed. Mr. Lindfield, to whom this property belongs, assured me in June last that he would use every endeavour to keep the place in proper order, and I think that has been done, as I have had no further complaints.

I have received nine notification certificates under the Infectious Diseases Act. This is comparatively a small number; the average for the five years during which the Act has been in force being twenty. Of these notified cases, six were typhoid, one diphtheria, and two erysipelas.

With regard to the origin of the typhoid cases, no cause could be given for that occurring in Ringmer, or the one in Barcombe, but in the four other cases which appeared at Plumpton Green, the use of impure water and defective drainage were, no doubt, the chief causes of the outbreak. Since then, the wells have been properly cleaned out and the water found to be sufficiently pure for drinking purposes. These cottages, from their low situation, have hitherto been very imperfectly drained, but the landlord has made arrangements with a neighbouring owner of adjoining land, whereby it is hoped the sewage may be more directly taken away.

Respecting those other diseases which are not at present classified as notifiable, but nevertheless are of an infectious character, I find that in the spring of last year a sudden and severe outbreak of measles occurred in Newick and Chailey parishes, necessitating the closing of of their schools.

Whooping cough was prevalent in some parts of the district. Two deaths were registered from this cause, one taking place in Hamsey the other in Plumpton. Both of these children were under five years of age.

Influenza, too, appeared suddenly in an epidemic form in the early part of the year. In a note in my journal dated February 23rd, 1895, I made the following entry:—"After five weeks of unusually severe frost, a gentle thaw commenced a few days ago, and in those few days several cases of influenza have occurred; during the severe weather there were a few straggling cases, but the milder atmosphere appears to have favoured the re-appearance of the disease in an epidemic form, and this remark not only applies to this locality, for a sudden accession of influenza is reported from all parts of the county."

This epidemic was characterised by, in most instances, attacking the mucous surfaces of the head, causing distressing cough followed often by deafness, and in many instances, great mental depression.

The number of deaths is, as I have before stated, considerably above the average, and it will be again observed that the mortality amongst infants under one year of age is very high, reaching within two of the exceptionally large number of that for the previous year—on referring to the causes of these early deaths, it is found that 13 were due to debility from birth, eight to bronchitis, five to diseases of the brain, one to dentition, two to whooping cough, and one to accident. Of the deaths occurring between the ages of 25 and 65 years, there were 32, as compared with 24 in the previous year, and of those which took place above the age of 65 years there were 47—14 in excess of the number registered in 1894.

The death-rate is found to be 25, as compared with 12 and 13 for the two preceding years.

The numbers of births during the year was 235, being 16 less than in the foregoing 12 months.

The deaths in the county asylum were 110, being nine in excess of the number for 1894.

With reference to drainage, nothing of importance has been undertaken during the past year.

Early in May last, the drains in connection with the workhouse infirmary were found to be very defective, necessitating the relaying of the whole system, and at the same time additional and larger ventilating shafts were erected in connection with the new drains.

The question of draining the houses situated at the north part of Wivelsfield, has, during the past year been a source of much anxiety. The parishioners have for some time past evinced a strong wish to remedy the

existing evil, but owing to difficulties as to a site for the outfall have not been able to carry out any efficient drainage scheme; if, therefore, it is found necessary to still collect the sewage from the cottages, I would advise the construction of one large cesspool for that purpose, placing it farther from the houses, and at the same time near to the main road, as being more convenient for emptying. The cesspools now in use are very imperfectly built, and dangerously close to the different residences. The drainage of Newick village is also still in abeyance, but the reason for this is not so easily explained.

In my last annual report I apologised "for again urging the necessity for some early action to be taken with a view to improving the drainage of Newick village." It is needless to again give in detail the circumstances which induce me still to urge this action. During the past 12 months there have been again frequent complaints from the villagers of offensive smells from the large pit or opening into which the sewage from the north part of the village runs (including that from two slaughter-houses), and the smell from this large collection of filth is often so bad as to make it necessary for the residents near to close their windows.

These remarks, as to the insanitary state of the north, are equally applicable to the south portion of the village, where there is also a large cesspit which receives the drainage from the row of houses situated to the right and left of the Crown Inn, and in a prevailing east wind the inhabitants of that part of the village are exposed to the obnoxious smells from this large accumulation, which is rendered the more objectionable from the fact that the soap suds from a large laundry run into it. There is no doubt but that filth accumulated in these large quantities favours the germinating and spread of choleraic and typhoid poison, and supply foci or centres from which at least typhoid fever, if not cholera, might take its origin.

I have reason to think that any technical difficulties that had existed with reference to outfall or the disposal of sewage from Newick village have now been overcome; it is therefore hoped that ere long the scheme, which has for so long a time been approved of by the parishioners, will be fully carried out.

Systematic inspections were made in most of the parishes, but more particularly of Ringmer, Barcombe, Plumpton, Newick, Chailey, and Wivelsfield.

### WATER.

In making these visits, it is now clearly seen that on the whole the dwellings of the poorer classes have by improved sanitation, such as the more perfect disposal of sink water, improved house drainage, and by enforcing the removal of unwholesome accumulations near their doors, been rendered more healthy, but a better supply of good water for these dwellings, is the one thing so urgently needed and without which no home can be kept clean or wholesome—I think I may state that at least one-third of the cottagers' houses in the district there is a deficiency either in the quantity or quality of the water supply, and in too many instances none at all, the only source being a near ditch or pond.

Some years ago a neighbouring water company asked permission to be allowed to lay mains through some of our villages, but at that time the proposal met with but little support, but I would ask, is it yet too late to reconsider some such scheme? The lack of a good supply of wholesome water is felt more or less by all classes in this part of the county, and any scheme which would supply this want would, I think, meet with remunerative support.

Your Inspector (Mr. Walls) informs me that during the past year certificates for the occupation of five new houses have been granted, viz., one in Plumpton, two in Ringmer, and two in Wivelsfield.

Nuisances reported, have been reported in the parishes of Barcombe, Ditchling, Hamsey, Plumpton, Ringmer, and Wivelsfield.

Mr. Walls has on five occasions met Mr. Mitchiner, the sanitary inspector for the Cuckfield Rural District, with reference to nuisances arising from the overflow from cesspools and sink drainage into the Cuckfield district, from property in the north part of Wivelsfield.

Samples of water have been submitted to me by Mr. Walls from six different parishes, all of which with one exception (after two or three samples had been taken, in some cases) I have certified as fit for drinking purposes.

Disinfectants have been supplied in all cases where found necessary, and infected houses have been fumigated either personally or by the direction of Mr. Walls, and in one instance the bedding, &c., destroyed, by order of the district council.

The whole of the cowstalls held by persons registered under the Dairies and Cowsheds Order were found to be in a satisfactory condition at the end of the past year.

I remain, gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

RICHARD GRAVELY,

Medical-Officer of Health.

Newick, March 9th, 1896.

